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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4279
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 005161

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BHUTTO CALLS ON THE AMBASSADOR

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 5160

[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 5102

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Pakistan People's Party leader Benazir Bhutto called on the Ambassador to thank her for the "critical" USG pressure that pushed Musharraf to resign from the Army and lift the state of emergency. Bhutto shared her concern about the government's ongoing and planned efforts to rig the elections and said she was counting on the USG to ensure "free and fair" elections. Bhutto shared an op-ed (faxed to SCA/PB) detailing some of her allegations, which is due to appear in the Washington Post or New York Times. Bhutto tried to convince Nawaz Sharif not to boycott the elections and confirmed that the PPP and Nawaz's Pakistan Muslim League-N were working on a shared list of demands to present to the government. But Bhutto made it clear that she will participate in elections. Unsurprisingly, she predicted that the PPP would sweep Sindh province and do well in the Punjab.
End summary

[1](#)2. (C) Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto called on the Ambassador at her residence December 5. She was accompanied by PPP Vice Chairman Amin Faheem. Bhutto thanked the USG for its public statements and private pressure, which she described as "critical," encouraging President Musharraf to resign as Chief of Army Staff and end the state of emergency (expected December 16). Bhutto added, however, that the international community must continue to call for the lifting of curbs on the media and the release of activists and judges.

A Litany of Fraud

[1](#)3. (C) Bhutto said that she is counting on the USG to ensure a free, fair and transparent general election on January 8, [1](#)2008. She came prepared with a list of stories and claims of how Pakistan's Election Commission and intelligence agencies are already rigging the upcoming elections and intimidating opposition candidates. She charged that government officials were behind recent, politically-motivated violent acts, including a murder and a kidnapping. Bhutto repeated her accusations that the government had 20,000 pre-stamped ballots ready to be cast for the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML). She also repeated allegations of "improvised polling stations," which did not really exist but which would have returns on election night. Bhutto complained that

nazims (mayors) were supposed to have stopped doling out government largesse, but many were still ordering new projects.

Meeting with Nawaz Sharif

¶4. (C) Bhutto said that during her November 3 meeting with Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif, she warned him against boycotting the general elections. She argued that, if PML-N sat out, it would only bolster Musharraf's party. Bhutto added that Sharif was leaning in favor of a boycott because he was being pushed by some of the smaller parties. However, most of the PML-N rank and file opposed a boycott. (Note: Bhutto provided a draft op-ed outlining fraud allegations and the rationale for benchmarks, which she hoped would be placed in the Washington Post or New York Times in the next few days. Post has faxed a copy of the draft to SCA/PB.)

¶5. (C) Bhutto said that Nawaz agreed to back off on a boycott only toward the end of their meeting. The compromise was to draft joint PPP/PML-N demands to the government which, if not met, would trigger action. Bhutto revealed that, for the PPP, action likely meant protests after the elections.

¶6. (C) Bhutto said she told Sharif to defer the issue of reinstating the judiciary, including the former Supreme Court Chief Justice, until after the elections and the seating of a new National Assembly. Ambassador said that we, too, supported an independent judiciary, but had told Nawaz that reinstating the judiciary was too difficult right now.

ISLAMABAD 00005161 002 OF 002

PPP Prospects

¶7. (C) Not surprisingly, Bhutto claimed her party would be "the first past the post," garnering as much as 38 percent of the vote. She admitted to being weak in Balochistan, but predicted pick-ups in Karachi, in the Frontier Province (NWFP), and in Punjab's cities. She said the PPP would "sweep" rural Sindh and southern Punjab.

¶8. (C) If Musharraf had no more than a 20 percent approval rating, as a recent, yet-to-be-released International Republican Institute (IRI) poll showed, Bhutto predicted that Musharraf's party would be badly defeated. She was grateful for USG support of a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) to help ensure polls are translated into reality election night, and urged the USG to consider contingency responses if the elections are not "judged free and fair."

¶9. (C) Comment: Privately, PPP aides tell us they expect Nawaz to participate in the elections. We expect the PPP to send us frequent updates on their allegations of electoral fraud over the next 35 days before the election. We are working behind the scenes to strengthen anti-fraud measures and will continue to press the Europeans to join our observer missions. End comment.

PATTERSON